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0521842522 - Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade

Zachary Lesser

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RENAISSANCE DRAMA AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLICATION

Shifting our focus from author to publisher and from first performance to first edition, Zachary Lesser offers a new vantage point on the drama of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, and their contemporaries. *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication* re-imagines the reception and meaning of plays by reading them through the eyes of their earliest publishers. Since success in the book trade required specialization, locating a play within its publisher's output allows us to see how the publisher read it and speculated that customers would read it. Their readings often differ radically from our own and so revise our views of the drama's engagement with early modern culture. By reading the 1633 *Jew of Malta* as a part of Nicholas Vavasour's Laudian specialty, for example, or the 1622 *Othello* in the context of Thomas Walkley's trade in parliamentary news, Lesser's groundbreaking study reveals the politics of these publications – for early modern readers and for us.

ZACHARY LESSER teaches Shakespeare and early modern drama at the University of Illinois, Urbana. He has published widely on Renaissance drama and the history of the book in *ELH*, *English Literary Renaissance*, and *Shakespeare Quarterly*. He is the editor of Thomas Dekker's *The Noble Spanish Soldier* (Globe Quartos).

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [T_B]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Lesser, Zachary.

Renaissance drama and the politics of publication : readings in the English book trade / Zachary Lesser.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0 521 84252 2

1. English drama – Early modern and Elizabethan, 1500–1600 – History and criticism.
2. Book industries and trade – England – History – 16th century. 3. Book industries and trade – England – History – 17th century. 4. Publishers and publishing – Political aspects – Great Britain. 5. Drama – Publishing – England – History – 17th century.
6. Drama – Publishing – England – History – 16th century. 7. English drama – 17th century – History and criticism. 8. Renaissance – England. I. Title.

PR651.L47 2004

822'.309 – dc22 2004045738

ISBN 0 521 84252 2 hardback

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For Naomi, who threw her ticket in the wind

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Preface

Like the early modern books I discuss in the ensuing pages, this book and its meanings are embedded in and shaped by a network of personal and professional relationships, which it is a real pleasure to acknowledge here. David Kastan believed in the project from the moment I first proposed it in his office. Without our numerous conversations, without his care, skill, and patience as a mentor, I would never have been able to write this book. Without the hours of procrastination spent talking to him about March Madness or where to get a good curry, I would not have enjoyed writing it so much.

At Columbia I also benefited immensely from Jean Howard's insightful and precise critiques and her exacting professional standards. She has improved every aspect of my work, and I have been constantly thankful for her tireless readings of it. Julie Crawford, Julie Peters, Anne Prescott, Jim Shapiro, and Tom Tanselle all taught me something of what I needed to know in order to conceive, carry out, and revise this project. I am grateful to Peter Platt not only for his comments on my work – though these are deeply appreciated – but also for his friendship, and for always being available for drinks and a Yankees game at those times when such things become necessary. I consider myself very lucky to have been part of a remarkable cohort of graduate students during my time at Columbia, especially those working in the Renaissance, who have offered valuable feedback on earlier versions of this material, including Ronda Arab, Pat Cahill, Michelle Dowd, Tom Festa, Becky Helfer, Tom Dale Keever, Ellen Mackay, Mona Nicoara, Doug Pfeiffer, Elliot Trice, Henry Turner, Paul West, and Chloe Wheatley. Alan Farmer, Aman Garcha, Ben Robinson, and Adam Zucker deserve particular thanks for discussing my work *ad nauseam*, or at least *ad ebrietatem*; I can only hope I have returned the favor. Ever since I met him, Douglas Brooks has been a recurring source of encouragement and advice, as well as critique when needed. My interest in early modern studies began

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before I arrived at Columbia, however, and for that I thank Morgan Griffin, who (more importantly) has been a great friend for well over a decade now.

My work was completed at the University of Illinois, where I have had the good fortune to land in a department of supportive and engaged intellectuals, whose imprint can be found scattered throughout this book. I especially want to thank Carol Neely, who read the entire manuscript with incredible care and made it much better in the process. All of my colleagues in Renaissance Studies, including Catharine Gray, Achsah Guibbory, David Kay, Ania Loomba, Lori Newcomb, and Michael Shapiro, have generously given their time and advice over the past three years. One of the wonderful things about Illinois is that its faculty talks about ideas with each other across fields, disciplines, and departments, and this book has benefited from numerous conversations with colleagues too many to name individually. I do need to single out Joe Valente, who read much of the book in manuscript and always provided sharp but constructive critique.

While writing this book, I received financial assistance from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Peter D. Shamonsey Memorial Fellowship at Columbia. The Research Board at Illinois provided support for travel to archives and funding for my wonderful research assistant, Jen Mylander, who commented on the manuscript and helped me learn about new areas of research. She, along with Tara Lyons and Elizabeth Zeman, painstakingly checked the notes, saving me from numerous errors; any that remain, of course, are my own fault. Part of my research was conducted at the Folger Library under the expert guidance of Leeds Barroll. While I was there, Peter Blayney kindly shared some small parcels from his vast store of knowledge. Chapter three began as a paper for Doug Brooks's seminar at the 1999 Shakespeare Association of America meeting; thanks to all the members of the seminar, especially Paul Werstine, for their helpful suggestions. A revised version of the same chapter was later presented at the Renaissance Society of America conference in 2001, and I want to thank those who responded to it there, including Cyndia Clegg (who also organized the panel) and Tom Berger. Part of chapter four was presented at the 2001 MLA, where John Plotz offered a thoughtful response. A version of chapter two previously appeared as "Walter Burre's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*," *English Literary Renaissance* 29 (1999): 21–43; and part of chapter five as "Mixed Government and Mixed Marriage in *A King and no King*: Sir Henry Neville Reads Beaumont and Fletcher," *ELH* 69 (2002): 947–77.

My final debts are the deepest, but fortunately, they come free of demands for repayment. My parents, David and Mary Lesser, taught me to read and

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to love books. I dedicate this book, and so much more, to Naomi Reed – my love.

I quote early modern texts in old spelling, except for silently changing long s to short; unless otherwise noted, the place of publication is London. I use the modern titles of familiar plays except when referring specifically to the material features of the early playbooks. For plays discussed in detail, I give the reference parenthetically, followed (for the ease of the reader) by act, scene, and line numbers from a modern edition, although quotations from the early editions will not often exactly match the text in the modern editions. I use the following modern editions: *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997); *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, general ed. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966–96); *Ben Jonson*, eds. C. H. Herford, Evelyn Simpson, and Percy Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52); John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. John Russell Brown (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); John Marston, *The Insatiate Countess*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984); Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *The Roaring Girl*, ed. Paul Mulholland (Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1987); Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (New York: Penguin, 1969).

Credits for illustrations

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- CD21* *Commons Debates 1621*. Eds. Wallace Notestein, Frances Helen Relf, Hartley Simpson. 7 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935.
- GH* *The Works of Gabriel Harvey*. Ed. Alexander B. Grosart. 3 vols. 1884.
- LJC* *The Letters of John Chamberlain*. Ed. Norman Egbert McClure. 2 vols. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939.
- PP10* *Proceedings in Parliament 1610*. Ed. Elizabeth Read Foster. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.
- PP14* *Proceedings in Parliament 1614 (House of Commons)*. Ed. Maija Jansson. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988.
- SR* *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640*. Ed. Edward Arber. 5 vols. 1875. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1967.
- STC* *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640*. Eds. A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave. 2nd edn. rev. W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and Katharine F. Pantzer. 3 vols. London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91.
- TN* *The Works of Thomas Nashe*. Ed. R. B. McKerrow. 5 vols. 1904–10. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.